

Niagara Community Observatory
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Under the Knife & Under the Gun: An Overview of Regional Government in Niagara

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Factual information about Niagara's current system of local government to inform the ongoing discussion about local government reform.

Where are we now?

- 2018 provincial election - Candidate Ford focussed on improving efficiency
- 2018 municipal election - PC government took unpopular positions and stuck with them
- Jan 2019 - Appointed Seiling and Fenn as advisors
- May 21, 2019 - End of public consultation
- June 2019 - Advisors will report

Nine questions for advisors

Questions on municipal governance and decision-making;

- a. Is the decision-making (mechanisms and priorities) of upper- and lower-tier municipalities efficiently aligned?
- b. Does the existing model support the capacity of the municipalities to make decisions efficiently?
- c. Are two-tier structures appropriate for all of these municipalities?
- d. Does the distribution of councillors represent the residents well?
- e. Do the ways that regional councillors/heads of council get elected/appointed to serve on regional council help to align lower- and upper-tier priorities?

Nine questions for advisors

Questions on municipal service delivery;

- f. Is there opportunity for more efficient allocation of various service responsibilities?
- g. Is there duplication of activities?
- h. Are there opportunities for cost savings?
- i. Are there barriers to making effective and responsive infrastructure and service delivery decisions?

Municipal Governance and Decision-Making

System of representation

Municipality	Number of Councillors	Method of Election
Fort Erie	6	6 wards
Grimsby	8	4 wards
Lincoln	8	4 wards
Niagara Falls	8	At large
Niagara on the Lake	8	At large
Pelham	6	3 wards
Port Colborne	8	4 wards
St Catharines	12	6 wards
Thorold	8	At large
Wainfleet	4	At large
Welland	12	6 wards
West Lincoln	6	3 wards
Region of Niagara	32	See below
Total	126	

Representation in area municipalities

- Range from 4 to 12 councillors
- Average of less than 10 councillors per municipality
- Compare to
 - Halton - 4 area municipalities
 - Peel - 3 area municipalities

Representation in area municipalities

- **It is very difficult to see a way to reduce the total number of councillors by a significant amount without reducing the number of municipalities**

Regional council

Municipality	Number of Councillors (incl. Mayor)	Population	Population per councillor
Fort Erie	2	30710	15355
Grimsby	2	27314	13657
Lincoln	2	23787	11894
Niagara Falls	4	88071	22018
Niagara on the Lake	2	17511	8756
Pelham	2	17110	8555
Port Colborne	2	18306	9153
St Catharines	7	133115	19016
Thorold	2	18801	9400
Wainfleet	1	6372	6372
Welland	3	52293	17431
West Lincoln	2	14500	7250
Regional chair	1		
Total	32		

Principle of representation

- All mayors serve on council
- Additional councillors added to effect representation by population
- Rep-by-pop is still not well served
- Size of council has increased, never decreased

Alternative methods of representation

- Weighted voting
- Regional ward system

Fewer councillors do not equal better governance

- Too many councillors detract from deliberative function
- Too few councillors weaken
 - Resident access
 - Representation function

Municipal Service Delivery

Division of responsibilities

Region	Shared	Area Municipalities
Police	Economic development	Arts and culture
Public health	Planning	Fire
Social services	Public transit*	Parks
Solid waste management	Roads and traffic	Potable water delivery
Wastewater treatment		Recreation
Water purification		Wastewater collection

Duplication of activities

- Most high-\$ services are allocated unequivocally to one level - police, social services, fire
- Others have wholesale-retail character - water and wastewater
- Others have service agreements - roads and traffic

Perceived problem areas

- **Planning**
 - Need to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, but
 - Municipalities should not be rushed into important decisions
- **Economic development**
 - History of unsatisfactory structural solutions

Overview of duplication

- Most important, high-\$ areas are not problematic
- Some other important areas require attention

Amalgamation

Amalgamation

- No past amalgamation has resulted in significant savings
- Other reasons to amalgamate
 - Niagara will speak with one voice
 - Solve problems in some service areas - economic development

Past experience indicates

- There will be significant conflict and short-term costs
- Benefits have been unclear
- Proponents of amalgamation should bear burden of proof

Conclusion

- Take part in consultation
 - May 1 - Niagara Region council chambers
 - Until May 21 - e-consultation
 - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/consultation-regional-government-review>
- Consider report of special advisors
- Present a ‘made in Niagara’ response