

# Mayor wants to see smaller council

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If Mayor John Close has his druthers, there'll be fewer people at the table at town council meetings after the next municipal election, and they'll be elected by all South Bruce Peninsula ratepayers.

"I would like to see a smaller council elected at-large," Close said in an interview Tuesday, the day after a public meeting in Wiarton called to elicit feedback on potential changes to council size and the town's ward system.

Fifty people at most showed up for the meeting, Close said, "fewer than we expected," and no one spoke in favour of the status quo — a mayor elected at-large and eight councillors, two from each of the four wards in the municipality.

And, Close added, "the existing council indicated, eight of us, that we were in favour of going to an election at-large and reducing the size of council, and one was on the fence."

Ratepayers in a referendum a few years ago split about 50-50 between at-large elections for councillors and the ward system, said Close. He doubts there will be another referendum on the topic because "no matter how you word a question, we all interpret it differently." In the crowd at Monday's meeting "there were a lot of speakers on election at-large and a few that spoke about sort of a hybrid, elected at-large with a couple of wards," Close said.

"The good points that were brought out about elections at-large were that councils that are elected at-large are usually much more unified, and I think that that's something that this council has really worked towards. We saw how the past council worked and even though we have our differences, we want to try and work things through in a professional way."

A number of people also spoke about the size of council, Close said. "and here we have nine sitting on council. So I think our numbers are certainly out of line with our population."

The mayor credited Coun. Jay Kirkland as being the "champion" behind the proposal for a smaller council elected at-large.

He "has certainly been in favour of this for a long time and really moved (it) forward," Close said.