

Municipality passes bylaw to dissolve ward system

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By Rob Gowan

South Bruce Peninsula has passed a bylaw to dissolve the ward system.

At its meeting on Tuesday, South Bruce Peninsula council passed the bylaw that will see the ward system replaced by an at large voting system for the municipality. The plan is to have the new system implemented in time for the next municipal election in 2014.

Mayor John Close said the feedback council has received shows there is an appetite among the public to do away with the ward system.

"At the public meeting a number of the responses were to go to (a five-member council) and dissolve the ward system," said Close.

The current system in South Bruce Peninsula has the mayor elected at large and two councillors elected from each of the four wards. Under the bylaw just passed, the system will see a mayor, deputy-mayor and three councillors elected at large.

Close said a five-member council makes sense.

"When you look around and see the population and the representation and the numbers, it appears we can do it with five," said Close. "We are not the only municipality operating at this level." Council has been discussing abolishing the ward system in the municipality for some time. Public meetings have been held and a survey was completed by about 85 people.

But Coun. Janice Jackson feels more public input on the matter needs to be received. She said even in the past week she has received phone calls and e-mails from constituents who want to keep the ward system.

The majority of other councillors have heard the opposite from constituents.

Councillors Jim Turner, Chris Thomas and Jay Kirkland all said the majority of people they are hearing from want to see the ward system dissolved.

Kirkland congratulated council for making the decision while there is still time to make any changes necessary before the next municipal election. Any change to the system would have to be in place a year prior to the next municipal election on Oct. 27, 2014.

Kirkland said council will now hear more from the public on what is thought of council's decision.

Kirkland said council has decided to go forward with a five-member council, but after receiving feedback it may be decided that a seven-member council or even a nine-member council would be a better option.

The bylaw can still be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board as such decisions often are, Close said.