

Reason behind council decision questionable

Owen Sound Sun Times

March 4, 2013

by Dick Waugh

Originally, this column's intent was to extend congratulations to the council of South Bruce Peninsula for finally dumping the ward system and going to an election at large in the next municipal election. That was the plan, but then . . .

Let's not go into the reasons for my change of mind just yet . . . that will come later.

But the notion to go into the election at large as opposed to the ward system was a long time coming as former councillors defended their personal political future by constantly supporting the ward system.

It was in the early 2000s when I was among those elected to the first council of South Bruce Peninsula. It had been decided before to use the ward system for selecting those to serve on this first time council. Amabel was given three ward positions, Wiarton given two, Albemarle got two and Hepworth got one.

It was not long before its makeup was criticized. Councillors from all wards voted on items that were particular to just one. Hence the notion that an election at large was the preferred way.

In the second election of South Bruce Peninsula there was a plebiscite to discard the ward system. Resident Richard Husak and former reeve of Amabel with the ward system, joining its neighbours, and now Chatsworth council will do the same. As Chatsworth Mayor Bob Pringle said, "I think this way people have more of a say in who they vote for."

Council has also reduced its size, from eight councillors to three, with a mayor and deputy mayor.

That is what former councillor Kevin Belbeck and I proposed back in 2001. It was a long time coming.

But then the second shoe dropped. Council voted unanimously to drop the whole notion of sewers and water services at Sauble Beach.

This apparently brought to a close the network of studies that have been done over the last 25 or more years on this subject. Never mind that studies earlier worried about septic systems galore in the Sauble area.

Well when I was a boy, you could do sand castles in pure sand, not the kind of soil that presently exists on the lakefront at the beach.

With a population of some 3,500 and a summertime population of perhaps 50,000, how can that soil begin to absorb all of the liquid waste, including sewage, without some long-term effects?

Coun. Janice Jackson was moved to tears over this decision, and all the others on council were acceptable of the notion that septic do not create a problem.

It seems strange that all of those studies done previously were swept aside.

I wonder if there is any community in Ontario with something of the beaches population that doesn't have water and sewer services?

This beach is a part of Ontario's overall tourist plan. It was a highlight of a Toronto Star section on vacationing in this province and Readers Digest did likewise.

A well-known provincial politician told me recently that the province eventually will get involved, without the municipal government. Perhaps he is right. Or should the First Nations lawsuit result in them having all the shoreline, which includes Sauble Beach, they could demand that water/sewers be installed. Then it will happen.

But in the meantime, the 2014 election is coming and Coun. Jackson headed the polls last time with her campaign against the water project. Maybe the others on council realized this and with the mail-in ballot and cottagers generally opposed to the water/sewer system, it may have a spinoff effect on the voting.