

Ward question unlikely to be on 2018 ballot: Clerk

By Brock Weir

The question of whether or not Aurorans would like to do away with its 'at large' Council in favour of a ward system is something residents have been asked before, but it's unlikely you'll be asked again when you go to the polls this fall.

Last asked this question at the ballot box in 2014, the window is about to close on the deadline to poll Aurorans again, leaving the development and implementation of a system of wards, each represented by one or two Council members, a task for those who land on the 2018 - 2022 Council term.

According to Mike de Rond, Clerk for the Town of Aurora, a bylaw would have to be passed before March paving the way for a referendum question.

'The Governance Committee [saw] a lot of value of a ward system here in Aurora and that we're big enough now to certainly have a really good look at it,' he tells The Auroran. 'A full review and suggesting of wards would have to take place next year and I think Council has agreed to that. They received the [committee's] minutes and they made no motions to have us undertake a last minute ward boundary review. It is certainly something we will be looking at next year and we will go through the full exercise in the next term of Council.'

'It will be up to them with, of course, public consultation to see how we go from there.'

While there is still an opportunity for an incumbent Council member to make a notice of motion to have a ballot question added in time for the October election, the Clerk says that is unlikely.

Instead, if the process begins in the next term of Council, he says it could take about six months for full consultation to take place and for Council to pass the bylaw. Once in place, it would be subject to another six month appeal period.

Dividing Aurora was a question which divided Aurorans when they turned out to vote in the 2014 Municipal Election.

But while the issue of whether or not to split up Aurora into wards, each represented by an individual Councillor, failed to catch fire the last time around, it is a matter reheated by the Committee.

Struck by this Council to undertake a wide-ranging menu of issues ranging from Council pay to Council composition, they looked into the merits of whether or not Aurora would be best-served by an alternative to our current 'at large' system in which eight Councillors are elected by the community as a whole.

The Committee began to re-look at the matter this past spring, ultimately deciding that there would be a significant number of details to pore over before a referendum could even be on the horizon, recommending that it be examined with an eye to 2022.

Over the summer, however, elected officials questioned whether or not there would be any chance of expediting it in time for 2018.

'I think we have to have a referendum,' said Councillor John Abel at the time. 'I don't know if we have enough time to do so right now, but I would like to move forward so that we would put that question again on the ballots for the next municipal election in 2018.'

While Council has the option of passing a 'configuration of wards' where no referendum is required and Council would decide how it is composed, the Clerk recommended not following that particular path.

'It's the kind of exercise that deserves a fulsome look,' he said. 'You wouldn't want it to appear quick or not in-depth in any way,' he said.

Councillor Abel said he agreed, noting, 'This Council has adopted community engagement before making any major decisions, so I am totally aligned with that thought process. I think we should explore that a little more deeply. We have a governance committee and whether they do that this term, or we strike a new one for the next term at the very beginning, [we should have] a fulsome discussion with the community and go forward adopting that.'