

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In response to an article in the Clipper, on the division of Springfield into the number of electoral wards, where residents have the opportunity to answer an on-line survey to select the number of wards as 4 or 6, I feel I have to submit the following:

For something as important as determining ward boundaries, we should have some background information as to how our current ward system works, why we want to change it and what all our options are. There should be a blanket mail out to every household in Springfield indicating all of the options. With only two options listed I assume that council has already made up their minds.

Currently, we have 5 electoral wards in Springfield. With the head of council voting, the possibility exists that a motion made could result in a 3-3 tie and the motion would be defeated in accordance with our procedural by-law. I served on the Springfield municipal council for 16 of the past 18 years, attended council meetings for 8 years prior to that, and I believe our current system works well. In 24 years I believe there have been no more than 10 tie votes. We are elected on a ward system but when we vote we should always be voting for what is best for our residents. Tied votes give council the opportunity to improve on any motion and bring that motion back. In my opinion the only reason the current council offered only 2 options on their survey (4 or 6 wards) is to eliminate any tied votes. However, there are occasions when issues should go back to council for more deliberation or to the public for more consultation. Tied votes can and have allowed this to happen.

The municipal act does not dictate that we have to have a council of any particular size, other than not larger than 10 councillors. There is more concern for settlement patterns, diversity of interests, population trends or topographic features and indicates that councils try to achieve an equivalent number of residents in each ward. Whether, we have 4 wards or 6 wards is incidental. When you have a municipality with a growth pattern such as Springfield where there is much faster growth in the town of Oakbank than in surrounding rural communities, you have a more difficult time trying to maintain an equivalency in the number of residents per ward. By themselves, neither of the 2 possible options in the survey solve that problem. Each of the separate wards in Springfield currently are larger than probably 75% of the rest of Manitoba municipalities. Reducing the number of wards to 4 will make it more difficult for councillors to attend to the problems in their ward. Increasing the number of wards to 6 will increase the cost of government over a 4 year term by over ¼ million dollars. Taxes are already high enough.

There are several other methods that can be implemented. The town of Oakbank can be set up as a Local Urban District. Oakbank could incorporate and create a new municipality. The municipality could keep the current 5 ward system and adjust the boundaries. A procedural by-law could be adopted whereby the mayor/reeve does not vote. These options were not offered as choices but should have been. It's time council put aside their personal agendas and base decisions on the needs of the residents and not the wants of the council.

Bob Bodnaruk / Ward 1