

St. Catharines councillors contemplating reform

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There might finally be an appetite for changing the way Niagara residents are governed, said St. George's Coun. Peter Secord, and St. Catharines should get in on the act.

Secord introduced a notice of motion at Monday night's city council meeting, asking staff to dust off previous reports on governance models and to compare them to what's going on elsewhere in the province.

But instead of following normal council procedure

and presenting the motion for a vote next week, Secord asked that it be stalled until the first council meeting of the new year, when the two newly-elected councillors — Matt Harris and Mat Siscoe — will



Peter Secord

be on board.

In addition, delaying the debate will give councillors time to think and talk about the possibilities for change, he said.

Secord said the recent election campaign revealed that voters have a "strong appetite" for effective use of their money, and many candidates for both city council and regional council campaigned on promises of reform.

Niagara's two-tier system of municipal government is often blamed for waste, duplication of services, and bureaucratic overlap and delays, but all previous efforts to reform it have failed.

In fact, in February 2008, regional councillors agreed they wouldn't even talk about it, approving a motion from Pelham

Mayor Dave Augustyn for the Region to "refrain from spending any further resources — financial or otherwise — on the debate or examination of the composition of regional council."

St. Catharines Regional Coun. Bruce Timms, who was at Monday night's city council meeting as an observer, said that two-year ban on the G-word might have helped to create

"pent-up demand" for reform.

Timms said he supports Secord's bid to revisit the issue, especially because it includes looking at what's working elsewhere in the province.

Timms said he thinks Niagara might finally be ready for change.

"It is very clearly on everybody's agenda," Timms said. "There is an acceptance that

something has to happen."

Outgoing Regional Chairman Peter Partington has also emphasized the need for a "one-voice agenda" in Niagara, calling for the newly-elected regional council to "be committed and take action" on changes to how Niagara is governed.

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