

Governance is a key issue for the next four years

It just wouldn't be a municipal election in Niagara if governance wasn't on the table.

That's not said with derision; it absolutely should be discussed in the campaign. But more importantly, something has to be done about it after Oct. 25.

Simply put, Niagara is over-governed.

Niagara has 12 local governments plus a regional government, with upwards of 120 elected representatives.

It's too much.

Further, the dynamics of Niagara Region put more emphasis on smaller municipalities at the expense of larger population centres. Discussion at the Region should focus on a model that is a closer approximation of representation by population.

That's not to say the urban voice should drown out the rural one, but is an acknowledgement that neither should the rural voice drown out the urban voice. All voices should be equal, and something needs to be done to strike a better balance between the two.

The Region should reconsider a proposal that was floated nearly a decade ago for a type of ward system that crosses municipal boundaries. Doing so would even the balance by reducing councillors, not adding them,

and may even cut into the parochialism that plagues the regional government.

But the governance debate has to go beyond the Region. It's an issue for St. Catharines as well.

Reducing the number of city councillors may not make much of a dent in the city's budget, but it is a symbolic move that says the city is streamlining its operations.

The St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce is advocating for abolishing the ward system, but it is getting, at best, a lukewarm reaction on the campaign trail.

But that shouldn't preclude other changes. There simply isn't a need for two councillors from each ward.

The next city council should consider cutting its ranks in half — electing one councillor from each ward instead of two. But at the same time the city's six regional councillors should become dual councillors, elected at large and serving at both the city and Region.

That eliminates six positions, and brings a pan-city perspective to the council table.

Likewise, other municipalities should consider making their regional councillors local representatives as well.

These discussions would be a good start to a better, more efficient Niagara.

— Calvin Reid