

UARB Hearing – Brief of Chamber Work on the Council Size Debate

Updated on May 19th, 2011

So – What Have We Done Thus Far?

Timeline

The Chamber is certainly not new to this issue. Our involvement in this subject has been extensive.

- **May 2002** → Nine years ago, the Chamber wrote to the city's District Boundary Advisory Committee, inquiring as to whether a system of 23 councilors was the most efficient and effective governance structure. We suggested a smaller council would generally be more effective in decision making and more cost efficient to manage.
- **February 2010** → The Chamber wrote a formal letter to the Municipal Clerk's Office, highlighting our position on Phase 1 of the District Boundary Review. We stated our support for a smaller council size of 15 councilors plus the mayor.
- **March 2010** → Annual Municipal Pre-Budget Submission 2010. In this submission, we formally expressed our opinion that a smaller council size would be a more efficient, focused, and responsive one.
- **March 2010** → Valerie presents to the Committee of Council, expressing the Chamber's support for a smaller council.
- **May 2010** → Annual Municipal Budget Report Card 2010 submitted to the municipality. In this report card, we gave the city the low grade of "C" under the category termed 'Effective Governance'. We reminded the City that we have been advocating for a more efficient and smaller council, but expressed our disapproval of the fact that council reform would not be investigated by a third party. We said that council reform must be investigated and determined objectively if a sensible outcome is to be achieved – sure enough, however, council itself voted and the result was to maintain the status quo.
- **June 2010** → E-mail sent out to councilors and the Mayor on the Phase 1 Recommendation put forth by the Governance and District Boundary Review Committee. In the e-mail, we restated our position of reducing council to 15 instead of the recommended 20.

- **August 2010** → Valerie writes an Op-Ed for Business Voice magazine, outlining the importance of, and the rationale behind, our position on the council size issue.
- **September 2010** → Annual Municipal Issue Note. A section was added to this annual document on ‘Effective Governance’, indicating our disappointment that Council had failed to reduce their size as a means to achieve a more efficient, effective governance structure.
- **March 2011** → Annual Municipal Pre-Budget Submission 2011. Included, once again, a chapter on ‘Effective Governance’, summarizing our involvement in the City’s District Boundary Review process to date.
- **May 2011** → Annual Municipal Budget Report Card 2011. Awarded the city a low grade of “C” for the second year in a row under the Effective Governance category for voting to maintain the status quo rather than implement any changes.
- *All of these letters, documents, and publications have been posted to our website and communicated to our 1500 business members.*
- *Legislation requires an electoral boundary review every eight years. The last one took place in 2003 prior to the October 2004 election. Council voted to remain with the status quo back then, too.*

Specifically, we have advocated for:

- A reduction in the size of council to 15.

Why? And Why Should the Business Community Care?

- Because it will help ensure more focused and efficient council meetings, which leads to quicker and better decision-making. This in turn will have a positive impact on our local businesses and the way in which they are governed. This includes the many tax and development-related decisions council faces on a regularly basis which often have enormous implications for local businesses. Halifax entrepreneurs depend on their city council to make the right choices for them in a timely manner.
- Because a minor reduction (such as to 20, down from the current status quo of 23) would be insufficient to create any significant, long-lasting change or benefit – and that should be the ultimate goal here.