

# Riverview to study elimination of ward voting

■ Although study will be undertaken, mayor likes current system because it guarantees representation for every part of town

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Riverview's bylaw committee is going to study the possibility of eliminating municipal wards before the next election but it doesn't appear there's much support for an at-large system.

Ward 1 Coun. Gordon Cowan brought the subject up at last night's council meeting, suggesting the town isn't well-served by a ward system.

"Every councillor should be answerable to everyone in Riverview," he said.

Cowan related a recent story about how a resident didn't get the help she needed immediately because she was getting passed from councillor to councillor to find the proper ward representative. He said if members of council are worried mainly about their wards, the community as a whole suffers.

"Some councillors are scared to change the status quo," said Cowan, who was acclaimed in his ward last election. "We hear that in council chambers, where people say, 'That's not in my ward.'"

Riverview currently has four wards, with one councillor each, plus three at-large councillors who all residents can vote for. Moncton has four wards, with two councillors each, and two at-large councillors, while Dieppe has five wards, with one councillor each, and three councillors at-large.

According to the provincial government, 89 out of 103 municipalities in New Bruns-

wick have only councillors-at-large. Cowan thinks Riverview should join the majority.

"We're limited in what we can do," he said. "It's our ward and we really don't care about the other places."

Mayor Bruce Fitch said if Cowan wanted a change, the best way would be to have the bylaw committee look at the matter and come back with a recommendation.

Council voted six to one for that to happen, with only David Burrell opposing. But, while the matter will be studied, there seems to be little support for a new system.

Deputy Mayor Ann Seamans, who was elected at-large, said the ward councillors do a good job representing sections of the community. She also pointed out that in an at-large system, all the councillors could come from the same area.

"The town wouldn't be evenly represented," she said.

Ward 4 Coun. Clarence Sweetland said he

thinks the ward system works and Councillor-at-large David Burrell said a change would be a step backwards. Coun. Bill McBeath has represented Ward 2 for eight years and he wants it to stay that way.

"They realize I'm there and if they need help, they're phoning a neighbour," he said.

Rather than shoot down the motion entirely, council voted to have the bylaw committee consider it to make a more informed decision at a later meeting. It was also decided the committee should look at the wards to see if any reforms are necessary because of changes in population.

Fitch said after the meeting it's easier for smaller communities to have an at-large system. He said he didn't want to pre-judge any council decision on the matter, but he likes things the way they are.

"I like the ward system because it guarantees representation for every part of town," said the mayor.