

Ross Kentner Commentary

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A new poll confirms what we all know...at least half the ratepayers in Ontario favour referenda to dismantle the new municipalities created through amalgamation. From 1995 to 1999, 814 local governments were consolidated into 554 restructured municipalities. Since then, the number of municipalities is down to 448. Now, in 2003, the dust is still settling and the notion of improved services at lower cost has proven elusive to say the least.

Hindsight being 20-20, we see how badly flawed the process was, and some of the rules and benchmarks that, had they been in place, might have avoided some of the mistakes and acrimony.

I've been told by some of the folks itching to untie the knots that bind that a Liberal victory in the next provincial election will be followed by legislation that will pave the way for turning back the hands of time. But reviewing Dalton McGuinty's comments on the SES Research/Osprey News Poll, he doesn't seem anxious to re-draw municipal boundaries. I'm reading between the lines here but he seems to be saying that if people can find a better solution and can reach agreement, they might be enabled to reverse a previous merger. Only NDP leader Howard Hampton is cut and dried on the matter. If an NDP government were elected we would be turning the clock back as far as unhappy amalgamations are concerned.

But, rarely in life are we able to go back and find things exactly as they were. Undoing municipal amalgamations will cost time without being able to recoup our losses. Some people believe that because savings have not been produced in every case, what we had must have been perfect. They're not in the real world. There continue to be imperatives for change and we always need to be open to ideas to improve the delivery of municipal services.

What is really needed now is not trying to go back, but an analysis of process and the errors that contributed to problems this time. Like it or not, there will be next times and when they arrive, there need to be rules and standards in place. As Meaford Mayoralty candidate, Wally Reif, says, *"One plus one plus one should be less than three."*