

CARDEN : RESOLVING TENSIONS/BUILDING CAPACITY To De-amalgamate or Not to De-amalgamate, That is the Question on the Minds of Carden Residents.

Rural dynamics often centre on a tension between old and new, between wanting to stay the same and wanting to change, between too much change and not enough. In Carden, this tension surfaced during the November 2003 municipal elections.



In the north-west corner of the City of Kawartha Lakes, Ontario, 45 km from the town hall in Lindsay, rests the (former) township of Carden. During the 2003 fall municipal elections, Cardenites and all City residents cast their vote for or against the de-amalgamation of the City of Kawartha Lakes. The Municipality was almost evenly divided (Carden included). The result: 51% voted in favour of de-amalgamation.

Carden residents remain divided-torn between getting City-level services and wanting local-based governance. Some residents of Carden believe that they would have no problem functioning independently from the City. As one resident told NRE, “we were able to function perfectly well before this whole amalgamation.”

Other residents believe that independence is unrealistic, “people should stop viewing the past in rose coloured classes...If we de-amalgamate we won't be able to cope with all the new municipal rules like the new water regulations. Services would simply not be up to par. The cost of de-amalgamating would be huge.”

Carden residents in favour of de-amalgamation believe that the decision-makers in Lindsay don't understand Carden's local issues. “They do not know where we are, let alone what we need...we are now part of a ward that is a part of a city-small fish in big water...”

On the other hand, those content with amalgamation note, “You can keep informed about local issues if you want...it is just a bit harder to access information now that the municipality is bigger-it can be done but it isn't always easy.”

Which is better for Carden and rural residents in general: city-level services or local governance? The answer lies



within the idea of building capacity. Upper levels of government pass

down the rules for service delivery, maintenance, etc., and in turn, the local municipalities must build capacity to handle costs and responsibility of meeting the mandatory standards of practice. Capacity is also about residents being part of the decision making process at the municipal level, feeling connected to their neighbours, developing strong interpersonal relations, and having a sense of community. Regardless of whether the City of Kawartha Lakes remains or de-amalgamation occurs, Carden residents will need to develop and balance both forms of capacity.

What happens next? Council members will meet with the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs to determine the fate of the City of Kawartha Lakes. The Minister will either accept or reject de-amalgamation. Either way, Carden residents will gain capacity from the experience. Their success in finding innovative ways to meet new costs will combine with a renewed energy as they work together to develop a new sense of community. In time, another set of issues will undoubtedly arise and create a new dynamic; a new tension that Carden will resolve again with a capacity enhanced from dealing with the de-amalgamation issue.

*David J. Connell, B. Leigh Golden,
Ellen Wall (University of Guelph)*

Contact the NRE2 project by email at nre@vax2.concordia.ca or on the Web at nre.concordia.ca