

Complicated but necessary

Regional governance not simple concept

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Trying to amalgamate P.E.I.'s rural communities will be a tough sell, says Dianne Griffin.

The Stratford town councillor was a part of a recent Institute of Island Studies symposium that took place at UPEI on Feb. 25 and looked at local governance on P.E.I and the way this province is falling behind when it comes to how it is governed both provincially and municipally.

There are many communities on P.E.I. with fewer than 200 residents that do not share amenities and struggle to afford residential services.

It is something that cannot last in the future, Griffin says.

“People have to be willing to collaborate. Unfortunately, traditionally a lot of these communities have been competing with one another We have to find ways to operate efficiently to be sustainable.”

Dr. Michael van den Heuvel agrees.

The professor of biology at UPEI was also a panelist at the local governance symposium. He says communities haven't been able to see the benefits of regionalizing governance and, instead, feel they are losing something.

“A lot of communities see it as losing their identity.”

The key to changing people's minds about amalgamation is ensuring the province and its residents are being involved and included.

“The will hasn't been there in P.E.I. (from the provincial government).”

There is an idea that looking into any sort of change to the current system, which has 73 municipalities, some of which have fewer than 200 residents, is getting past people's perception of it costing them, said van den Heuvel.

“I think there's this idea that it's government bureaucracy and it'll cost more money.”

Any sort of regionalizing of services would end up saving the communities money in the long run, said van den Heuvel.

“I see it working. There's a lot of resistance to that.”

In order for P.E.I. to remain sustainable, he agrees with Griffin that communities have to amalgamate before the Island falls even further behind the rest of the world.

“I think it could be done in a way where it's efficient.”